
My NASA Data - STEM Career Connections

Meet Erika Podest, Research Scientist



Job Title

research scientist

Bio

How did you discover your passion for Earth Science?

I grew up in Panama, a country with an exuberant nature. As a child, I often spent my weekends enjoying the outdoors and from a young age, I was intrigued by the perfection of nature and its purpose. This curiosity, appreciation, and respect for nature have carried in me and driven my desire to become a scientist focused on Earth Science.

What do you enjoy most about what you do?

It's hard to put my finger on just one thing as there are so many aspects that I love about my work. Anywhere from the multidisciplinary nature of my projects and interacting with scientists from many different fields, to understanding new aspects of Earth's environment, to doing field work, to ultimately knowing that at the end of the day I am helping better understand our planet and hopefully help preserve it.

What inspired you to work in this field?



It all leads to my exposure to the exuberant nature of my country Panama and my desire to help understand the value of such places so that they can be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Where do you work and do you remember what it was like on your first day of work?

I am a scientist in the Water and Carbon Cycles Group at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. On my first day of work I kept reminding myself where I was. It was one of the most exciting days of my life.

What are some of the most important lessons you have learned in your life?

Perseverance, consistency, and patience are key factors for success. Also, your work is much more enjoyable and satisfying when you love what you are doing.

What do you consider your greatest accomplishment?

Helping inspire the next generation of scientists.

Who has been the biggest influence on your life, and what lessons did they teach you?

My father has been the biggest influence in my life. He taught me perseverance, and humility and always encouraged me to follow my dreams. He also built confidence in me to overcome life's challenges.

How has your career been different than what you'd imagined?

It is not different than what I had imagined. Since I can remember I have wanted to pursue a career in Earth Science, however, I never imagined I would be pursuing it at NASA.

What does your future hold?

Professional growth, being involved in the next generation of satellite data for Earth Science studies and addressing gaps in Earth Science that will help advance our understanding of our planet.

What one piece of advice would you like to pass on to the next generation?

Whatever you do always give it your best effort. Become agents of change! As Mahatma Gandhi said “be the change that you wish to see in the world”